



MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Joanne Sturges, Acting Executive Officer  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Chief Administrative Officer  
Acting Director of Health Services  
Director of Public Health

At its meeting held February 28, 2006, the Board took the following action:

S-1, 20 and 21

The following items were called up for consideration:

S-1

Discussion of the planned separation of Public Health from the Department of Health Services and consideration of the related ordinance changes, as requested by the Board at the meeting of December 13, 2005.

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Ordinance for introduction amending the County Code, Title 2 - Administration, Title 8 - Consumer Protection and Business Regulations, Title 10 - Animals, Title 11 - Health and Safety, Title 12 - Environmental Protection, and Title 20 - Utilities, relating to the separation of the public health and health officer functions from the Department of Health Services; creation of the Department of Public Health and the office of the Director of Public Health; and to make technical amendments to Titles 8, 11, 12 and 20 that result from the separation of the public Health and health officer functions from the Department of Health Services.

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Ordinance for introduction amending the County Code, Title 6 - Salaries, adding and establishing the salary for two employee classifications in the unclassified services and one employee classification in the classified service; adding a new department to Chapter 6.77, Public Health Department; adding and/or changing certain classifications and numbers of ordinance positions in the Department of Health Services - Administration and Department of Health Services - San Fernando Valley cluster; and repealing the Department of Health Services - Office of AIDS Programs and Policy, Alcohol and Drug Programs Administration, Children's Medical Services, and Public Health Services.

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Dr. Bruce Chernof, Acting Director of Health Services, Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, Director of Public Health, Department of Health Services and David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer addressed the Board.

Supervisor Antonovich made the following statement:

“On June 28, 2005, this Board approved a motion which supported, in concept, the separation of the Department of Health Services into a Department of Public Health. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed which describes programs where the Department of Health Services and the Department of Public Health share responsibilities or where the effectiveness of their separate responsibilities are dependent on the effectiveness of the other department’s programs.

“The MOU also develops a joint working group consisting of existing staff to meet at least quarterly to monitor the program areas in the MOU.”

“I therefore recommend that the Board adopt the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Health Services and the separate Department of Public Health and begin the process of implementing the separation.”

Supervisor Knabe made the following statement:

“Over the last two months, this Board has received a very thorough report from its Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) that recommended that the Public Health function and the budget needs to be reasonably insulated from future revenue uncertainties and shortfalls forecast for County hospitals and clinics. The CAO’s report has shown that the two functions can be separated fiscally and administratively and that in doing so may lead to greater transparency as to where and how taxpayer funds are spent. I do not deny the importance of all this.

“From the beginning of this discussion, my concern has always been that current operational issues and the looming deficit in the Department of Health Services may make it difficult for Public Health to receive sufficient attention, despite growing threats of epidemics, bioterrorism and the burdens of chronic disease in our County.

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“But in spite of the analysis done and the feedback, for and against, from formidable health experts and consumer advocates, questions remain. Is separating two functions that frequently inter-relate with each other, the best and only option here? Separation may lead to more fiscal and administrative transparency, but will it necessarily lead to better services for the public or will it become just another bureaucratic behemoth with tunnel vision?

“There is no question in my mind that both Personal Health and Public Health need to work more closely together than they have in the past. Separating the two is not necessarily the answer. In fact, I fear that the opposite may occur. While a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) may help, the risks are too high for me to support an entire separation at this time.

“Do I recommend going back to the status quo. Absolutely not! Our Public Health functions must be stronger and more efficient than they are now. The public deserves no less. But we don’t have to create two independent bureaucracies to reach that goal.

“To make this work, we need a stronger firewall to divide its financial and other resources from the personal health side, and this must be done with the necessary operational transparency to assure that public health resources are specifically used for the public health mission. The specifics of strengthening Public Health’s operating autonomy can be based on lessons learned from recent planning already done. The diligent work by County staff to draft an interdepartmental MOU can still be used to better integrate services to people whose needs cross the boundaries between personal health, public health and mental health. It is imperative that the lessons learned from this exercise must not be lost; they can and must be used to benefit the County and its residents.

“I therefore recommend that the Board:

1. Determine that the proposal for separate Departments of Health Services and Public Health is not appropriate for implementation at this time, but direct that proposed ordinance changes and other plans for the separation be preserved should circumstances change;

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2. Declare as policy that Public Health is a distinct semi-autonomous operation within the Department of Health Services. Furthermore, that the Public Health Officer, in close cooperation with the Director of Health Services, is the lead authority to this Board and to the public for all public health matters;
3. Instruct the Chief Administrative Officer to make recommendations to the Board as part of the 2006-2007 budget process to further strengthen Public Health and hold its management accountable as a semi-autonomous unit of Health Services, with a clearly defined mission and its budget and resources clearly distinguishable from that of personal health; and
4. Recommend whether and under what terms an interdepartmental MOU between Health Services/Public Health and Mental Health is appropriate.”

After discussion, Supervisor Burke made a suggestion that Supervisor Knabe's recommendation No. 2 be amended to allow Public Health to continue with a semi-autonomous approach to operations; and instruct the Chief Administrative Officer and the Acting Director of Health Services and the Director of Public Health to return to the Board in six months on whether or not a full separation of Public Health from the Department of Health Services should proceed. Supervisor Knabe accepted Supervisor Burke's amendment.

Dr. Genevieve Clavreul, Grace Lubwama, Dr. Lester Breslow, Dr. E. Richard Brown, Kathy Ochoa representing SEIU Local 660, and other interested persons also addressed the Board.

After further discussion, on motion of Supervisor Knabe, seconded by Supervisor Yaroslavsky, unanimously carried, the Board took the following actions:

1. Deferred the decision on the separation of Public Health from the Department of Health Services, including the related ordinances (Item Nos. 20 and 21) until May 23, 2006; and

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S-1, 20 and 21 (Continued)

2. Instructed the Chief Administrative Officer, Acting Director of Health Services and Director of Public Health to report back to the Board with specific recommendations on ways to make Public Health more independent within the existing structure of the Department of Health Services as an alternative to full separation of Personal Health and Public Health.

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County Counsel

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